



# Shadow Report on the Implementation of SDG 15.2 in Benin from a Gender Perspective

Amis de l'Afrique Francophone-Benin (AMAF-BENIN)

## Executive Summary

Amis de l'Afrique Francophone Benin (AMAF-BENIN), member of the Global Forest Coalition (GFC), and in cooperation with Beninese civil society, prepared this alternative report on progress in implementing SDGs 5 and 15.2 in Benin. The first section of the report outlines on the Government of Benin's efforts in achieving SDG 5 and SDG 15.2. The second section provides analysis of these achievements, followed by recommendations for better reaching these two SDGs. For SDG 5, statistics are mainly based on primary school enrollment. From this point of view, there is an

evolution towards near perfect parity in primary school. However, gender-based development analysis indicates that women in Benin only benefit from 38.6% of living conditions (health, empowerment, labor market), with a deficit of 61.4% compared to men. From the analysis of the Benin government's commitments and achievements in combating acts of forest resource destruction, it can be seen that women, like men, suffer the burden of the constraints linked to environmental degradation. With regard to beneficial actions, the decision of 1 March 2017, prohibiting the export

of timber shows a reduction of anthropogenic pressure on forest resources. Nevertheless, one wonders if the gender approach in the conservation of natural resources is a reality in Benin. After analysis of the situation, it was recommended to the Government of Benin to effectively involve women in decision-making bodies, to intensify the sensitization towards the rural populations for the maintenance of the ecosystem, and support Beninese civil society's access the financial resources necessary to ensure a consistent citizen watch.

# Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) puts people at the center of development and includes achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, and the preservation and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems, ensuring sustainable use and sustainable forest management. Due to the importance of these goals and greatness of these challenges, AMAF-BENIN, GFC, and Benin Civil Society Organizations, as part of our efforts in citizen control and monitoring the implementation of SDGs, had the responsibility for producing an alternative report on achieving SDGs 5 and 15.2. The exercise consists in reviewing the commitments and different actions the Beninese government has undertaken to reduce gender imbalance and work towards sustainable management of natural resources and the environment.

Then, analyzing the effectiveness of the actions undertaken. Based on this analysis, stakeholders at the validation workshop of this alternative generate political commitment to reducing inequalities between women, men, young people and people with disabilities, which implies action that takes into account all dimensions of inequality. This should now guide the Benin Government, and its development partners, towards the choice of projects integrating technical capacity building, while being concerned social development and human rights.

Thus, the reduction inequalities will contribute to an improvement in the rights of women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and local communities to education, training and health. This will give them greater access to

economic resources, and infrastructure, encouraging an increase in their productivity and stimulating growth. At the same time, the reinforcement of their political role accompanies and consolidates these achievements.



## The Status of Gender and the Environment in Benin

According to the "Prioritization Report of the SDG Targets in Benin," gender inequality remains unresolved and the targets of SDG 5, retained as a priority, make it possible to continue the efforts undertaken in the context of the MDGs. Specifically target 5.1, which addresses all forms of discrimination against girls and

women, and target 5.5 which calls for proactive policies for women's participation in decision-making. Given vulnerabilities to climate change, SDG 15.2 targets land-life conservation policies to support the sustainable management of natural resources.

In Benin, women occupy a special place in the use of natural resources, the degradation of which causes harm to society. As development actors, they suffer over-proportionately from the constraints of environmental degradation. To alleviate this situation, the government has taken new measures. By Decision



No. 08/2017/PR/SGG/CM/OJ/ORD reporting on the Council of Ministers, dated 1 March 2017, the Government of Benin has shown its commitment to fight against the destruction of forest resources. Through this decision, the Government of Benin has suspended the exploitation and export of forest products, as well

as the issuance of approvals; banned the export of all species of wood except those from plantations,



Indigenous woman planting trees in the sacred Têdozoun forest. AMAF-Benin

public and private, notably Teak, Melina and Acacia, whatever their level of processing; prohibit the exploitation of natural forest species in the State classified domain; authorized the exploitation of protected natural forests exclusively for purposes of national consumption; the sale of timber from the National Office of Wood's (ONAB) state-owned plantations through auctioning, to all users approved by the forestry administration of a volume defined

over a delivery period, on the basis of a price; the establishment of a control belt around the production areas, reinforced by the redeployment of a mobile brigade to clean up the exploitation and marketing of timber and charcoal ; and the ban on the export of charcoal.

These decisions led to a reduction in anthropogenic pressure on forest resources. For example, the export of wood is prohibited today in Benin. Similarly, the felling of a tree today is subject to the authorization of a forest officer. But this policy affects women and men differently as well as their livelihoods. It has had huge negative impacts on the financial returns of men and women. Women are banned from exporting charcoal and are now limited to promoting non-timber forest products. To this end, reforms followed to sanitize the exploitation and marketing of timber and fuelwood (charcoal) even at the national level. It is the same for the men of this domain. On the other hand, the authorization of the exploitation of natural protected forests, exclusively for purposes of national consumption; the sale of timber from the National Office of Wood's (ONAB) state-owned plantations through auctioning to all users approved by the forest administration, benefits men much.

A clear gender approach is lacking in the official policies of Benin regarding the conservation of natural resources and environment and sustainable development. However, in the past and still

today, there is gender-youth-disabled differentiation in socio-economic and cultural terms, which implies that the experience and knowledge of women, youth and people with disabilities are different from men and therefore raise theoretical, analytical and practical questions about their environmental relationships.

Problems persist with regard to the exercise and enjoyment of human rights. Legal rights and the application of new laws is still problematic including issues in access to land. The land access problems affects women and girls significantly, or their right of access to land is very limited if it exists at all. The situation varies according to whether the persons concerned are educated or not; whether they come from the countryside, or whether the influence of custom and tradition is strong or moderate in the family. In addition, the dysfunction of justice discourages women from using it. Also, in the case of family conflicts, it is the traditional judges who intervene in a general way and apply customary law, heavily influenced by socio-cultural constraints that are negative for women, young people and people with disabilities.

Despite new government efforts, the same inequalities remain in Benin. Low purchasing power, non-compliance with texts and laws, the influence of parents on access to land, water and inputs, the legal and political status of women and people with disabilities, is the result of sociocultural gravity and its socio-demographic characteristics.



# An Assessment of the Current State of Implementation of SDG 5 and SDG 15.2 in Benin

In general, gender issues (SDG 5) are not well integrated in the baseline planning documents (Prioritization of Sustainable Development Goal Targets - SDGs in Benin, 2017). Although the gender issue is transversal, the Rapid Integrated Analysis (RIA) tool reveals that several sectors do not have sectoral strategies that can address the targets of this Goal. These are, in particular, the sectors of Governance,

Defense and Security, Digital Economy, Energy and Mining, Tourism and Culture, Agriculture, Infrastructure and Transport, Life and Sanitation, Environment and Natural Resources and Sports. Statistics on the implementation of SDG 5 are mainly based on primary school enrollment. From this point of view, there is an evolution in favor of near-perfect parity in primary schools in 2014 of around 0.95 according to the Multiple

Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2014).

According to the UNDP, there are still glaring inequalities in access to paid employment in Benin, as well as a deep gender gap in the labor market. Women now represent 41% of paid workers outside agriculture, compared to 35% in 1990. In terms of gender-based development indicators, women in Benin only benefit from 38.6% of living

Women in Southern Benin. Rémi Kahane, GlobalHort/Flickr





conditions (health, empowerment, labor market), with a 61.4% deficit compared to men: If men receive 100 units for their well-being, women, in turn, get only 38.6 units for gender-only considerations. Reproductive health is the single most important contributor to gender inequality in Benin. With regard to the representation of women in Parliament, Benin registered a 7% participation rate in 2016. (Human Development Report in Africa - UNDP Benin, 2016).

The Palma index is defined as the ratio of average income per capita of the richest 10% households to that of the poorest 40%. The Palma index for Benin is 8.8%

(UNCTAD Secretariat/ World Bank, 2018).

According to the Forest Resources Assessment in 2015, Benin's total forest cover is estimated at 4,311,000 ha, or 39% of the national territory (Data Directory FRA-FAO, 2015). However, most of this forest cover is degraded and fragmented. Benin has experienced significant deforestation over the last 30 years. According to FAO figures, Benin has lost 29% of its forest cover since 1990. With 2.5% of deforestation, Benin has one of the highest annual deforestation rates in the world (AfDB, 2017).

Benin also achieved a reforestation rate of 4.22% in 2015 according to the annual report of the Directorate General of Forests and Natural

Resources and the National Office of Wood (DGFRN, ONAB Annual Report, 2015). In view of these statistics, it would be desirable for Benin Civil Society Organizations to conduct parallel data collection research in order to confirm or refute the above data.

It is so worth noting that Benin's military budget for 2018 is nearly 68 billion CFA francs (12.5 million USD), while Benin's environmental budget in 2018 is estimated at 149.4 billion francs (232.8 million USD) (Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2018).





# Key Drivers of Deforestation and Inequality in Benin

The direct causes of deforestation, defined as having an immediate cause-consequence link with the destruction of forest cover, are reinforced by underlying factors such as economic factors, technological advances, use of firewood by women, grazing, demographic pressures, political measures such as urbanization, and forest management based on tree monoculture. All of these causes interact in different ways in Benin and explain the differences and similarities between deforestation dynamics. In addition to the expansion of infrastructure and the development of wood extraction, agriculture is the most important direct cause of deforestation in Benin. (state "situation" of the World's Forests, FAO-Rome, 2016).

Specifically in Benin, deforestation can be seen from north to south. About 100,000 ha of forest are destroyed each year for a variety of reasons, including exporting timber, bush fires, clearing land for agriculture, cutting trees for lumber, service or fire, or to make charcoal (Loubegnon & Libois, 2011). Thus, there are large gaps in the state's classified forests and sacred or fetish forests, conserved by communities for centuries, which are also threatened.

The drivers of inequality in Benin can be summed up in low purchasing power, the non-application of texts and laws in place and the influence of parents for access to land and inputs. For example, 85.1% of plot owners are men versus 14.9% of women, and only 12% of women accessed land by inheritance compared to 88% of men. Additionally, the legal and political status of women and persons with disabilities, and the application of customary rights in some areas drive inequality. Many women remain confined to the lower end of the spectrum of economic opportunities (Integrated World Survey on Household Living Conditions, 2011).

Some good practices identified by the workshop participants in this respect were the promotion of beekeeping in certain regions of Benin. This contributes to sustainable development because it does not destroy the environment; Beekeepers are friends of the environment as they seek to conserve the forests and vegetation where the bees live. Beekeeping is a good way to generate income from natural resources without damaging them. Beekeeping contributes to the maintenance of biodiversity through pollination. When beekeepers are supported and have access to good markets for their products, they will want to support local conservation efforts. The pollination of flowering plants

by bees maintains biodiversity. Beekeeping is a revenue-generating activity that, if access to markets is guaranteed, provides an easy source of profit. It is open to all because bees can be raised by women or men of all ages. In fact, bees do not need to be looked after every day; they take little time and do not prevent other activities. In addition to beekeeping, there is also the promotion of other non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

A bad practice identified by the workshop participants is forest management policies that promote monocultures of identical tree species in the classified and communal forests of Benin. Another bad practice is the destruction of forests in favor of the intensification of cotton cultivation. From the analysis above, we note that the traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous peoples, local communities and women are seldom addressed. Given that indigenous peoples, local communities and especially women derive the maximum benefit from their income and livelihoods from forest resources, it would be desirable for them to be involved in all forest management policies and strategies. Also, some forests are places of conservation for the culture and cultural values for Indigenous Peoples and local communities.



# Conclusion and Recommendations

In general, Benin has made some progress in achieving the SDG targets it has identified as priorities. But the issue of gender and the environment remains a challenge in Benin. Although the gender issue is cross-cutting, it is noted that several sectors do not have sectoral strategies that can address the targets of SDGs 5 and 15.2.

The RIA suggested the need for coherence across sectors to address a relatively large number of SDG targets and underlined the lack of synergy of actions. This should be corrected during the elaboration of Benin's National Development Plan, to ensure an integrated and coherent approach to public interventions. The analysis highlights the predominantly sectoral approach that underpinned the government's baseline planning documents. Thus, the sectors that

should be contributing to achieving the targets with intersectoral synergy, do not present any concerted action.

The workshop welcomed the contribution of the participants, reflecting the views of key stakeholders and rights holders on the issues raised. It should be noted that the targets addressed by this shadow report were very important to the participants. Benin should address the weaknesses identified in the subsequent policies in order to benefit from the multiplier effects achieved by the full and equal participation of women, men, young people, and persons with disabilities which will contribute to the sustainable development process in general, and forest resource conservation and the empowerment of girls and women in particular.

At the end of this workshop, the following recommendations were made:

- The effective involvement of women in decision-making bodies;
- Promote increased access to public information;
- Support Civil Society with the financial resources and resources needed to ensure the citizen monitoring of government actions;
- The promotion of improved stoves and alternative energy options that reduce the demand for fuelwood;
- The promotion of ecological agriculture;
- The restoration of forests with indigenous and diversified species;
- Increase awareness of rural populations on ecosystem maintenance.

Degradation of the Pésésoulou forest through over-grazing. AMAF-Benin





Workshop on SDGs in Benin. AMAF-Benin



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This report explores the perspectives of Benin's Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on the progress of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identified as priorities for Benin. It is the result of a participatory workshop organized by Amis de l'Afrique Francophone-Bénin (AMAF-BENIN), with financial support from the Global Forest Coalition (GFC) and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC). We used participatory tools in the workshop and gathered the perspectives of several CSOs regarding the progress in implementing SDGs 5 and 15.2 in Benin.

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